AT EASTER.

When Easter comes, the church bells loudly ring out notes of joy and thanks.
When Easter comes, the busy Cupid starts his round of cunning pranks.

EASTER ETCHINGS.

A Few Loose Leaves From a Notebook of Life.

What a bonnet it was! The very bandbox that it came in seemed to appreciate the value and magnificence it contained—such a substantial, well varnished, responsible bandbox. Up the steps the messenger carried it and rang the bell. Her husband felt a chill come such as that we experience when, according to the old gossip, somebody walks over our future grave.

It was Easter, and if one can't have a new bonnet after the Lenten deprivation and abstinence, when is one entitled to one anyway?

Mrs. Frontpew tried it on in the parlor and said her husband was a duck. Never was there a husband so good and kind and with such taste.

The doorbell rang again. Another messenger boy came up.

"This is Mrs. Frontpaw's bonnet," said the messenger. "The other one was left by mistake. It should have gone to Mrs. Slyly, next door."

With a blanched face she gave back the bonnet and looked at her own. Bird for bird, feather for feather, flower for flower—it was the same as the other.

That is why Mrs. Frontpew was not in church on Easter and why Frontpew has been taking supper down town and looks like a man upon whom great woe is fallen.

How could he tell? The milliner merely showed him a pretty headdress, and he ordered one made up like it.

But that's like a man.

"The Destruction of the Poor Is Their Poverty."

A little pot of mignonette stood in the window of a crowded tenement. A poor woman bent over it and tenderly plucked a withered leaf from its fresh green crown. The sun shone gayly on the blue bay, and the woman stood watching the little glint of dancing water she could just see between the houses.

She put a tiny sprig of the faded mignonette in her faded dress and took down her shabby bonnet. Then she walked as far as she could to get a good breath of fresh air. She passed a church door standing open and heard a burst of music. So she wandered timidly in and sat humbly down in a quiet corner.

The altar was fair with flowers. The woman drew a deep breath of delight when she saw the lilies.

A man took hold of her arm. "You're in some one's pew," he said roughly.

The woman rose nervously. "I'm sorry," she stammered. "Where are the free seats?"

"There ain't no free seats in this church," sneered the man.

The woman hurried out. She put her thin hands upon the bunch of mignonette. The clergyman was announcing his text. She just heard it as she passed through the swinging doors:

"He was despised, rejected, a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief."

Toil Not Nor Spin.

A very untidy and reprehensible person hurried up the steps of a big house early Sunday morning. Her hair was untidy, and her shoes were run down at the heel. She talked to herself, too—a disgraceful habit.

"Hot coffee and two eggs. Yes, the two eggs for Easter," she whispered as she rang the bell. Her eyes shone. A plump little rosebud of a girl opened the door. The woman smiled eagerly. "I've finished it," she gasped.

"Well, it's about time," scolded Miss Rosebud. "You had no business to keep me in such suspense. I've worried myself almost sick."

She took the bundle and hurried up stairs.

"Please," faltered the reprehensible person, "please, the money. I worked all night"—

"Come some other time," said Miss Rosebud over her shoulder. "Don't bother me now."

The untidy woman went down the steps. Her lips trembled, but Miss Rosebud had the loveliest dress of all the lovely new dresses in the big church on the avenue that morning. At least that's what one young man in the congregation said, and he ought to have known.

Trouble In the Sanctum.

"See here," said the editor of the Plunkville Bugle to his new reporter, "you neglected to refer to the proprietor of the Silver Star restaurant as a 'genial boniface' in your article speaking of him yesterday, and now he threatens to sue me for my board. You may do for large cities all right, but you ain't on to Plunkville yet, not by a heap."—Indianapolis Journal.

SHORT STORY WRITERS.

Special Gifts of Many Bright Men and Clever Women.

NEW YORK, April 10.—A foreign country is to one's own country, as has been said, a kind of posterity. This is specially true of literature. When an author is welcomed and praised abroad, he may rest assured that his fame will reach another generation. Whatever value the early Americans may have set on their writings immediately after the establishment of their independence they were not recognized as a literary people until early in the present century, when Washington Irving and subsequently Fenimore Cooper were accepted in Europe as authors of freshness, individuality and power. Since then our literary reputation has steadily and rapidly increased across the sea, and now most of our books are not only reproduced in Great Britain and her colonies, but are translated into the leading continental languages.

Our fame in fiction stands highest for short stories, and deservedly perhaps, for our novels and romances in general are not ranked there as equal to those of the old world, fast as they are gaining in originality and strength. Irving indeed won his first substantial renown by the "Sketch Book," the first volume of which he printed in London at his own expense, though Murray later gave him $2,000 for the complete work. It is a collection of short stories, the most notable of which are "Rip Van Winkle" and the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and attracted immediate attention from its novelty and the beauty of its sentiment and style.

It must be more than 50 years since Edgar Allan Poe wrote the greater part of his short stories, collected and published posthumously as tales. They are the strangest and most remarkable of his writings, and on them his reputation rests. They have been translated into all modern languages and have been everywhere admired and lauded for their invention, subtlety, variety and perfectness of expression. There is nothing that approaches them in any literature. They stand alone, the unmistakable product of morbid genius, but the highest genius of its kind. They combine to a wonderful degree the poetic, metaphysical and mathematical faculties. Their language is so closely incorporated with the thoughts that the two are indivisible to the understanding. The "Fall of the House of Usher," the "Murders In the Rue Morgue," the "Descent Into the Maelstrom" and the "Facts In the Case of M. Valdemar" are not only original, but they are originality itself. They are unforgettable. Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Twice Told Tales" were probably written about the same time in divers periodicals, where they drew no attention whatever, and very slowly made their way to favor when presented under that title. As unlike Poe's stories as possible, they are models of their kind, and the style is faultless. No man, I venture to affirm, has ever written English prose like Hawthorne.

I have mentioned these departed authors—they live and will long live in their works—to show what a genius the Americans have had for short stories almost from the very beginning of their literature. And the genius is clearly continued, as we see by any number of living authors, some of them just coming on the stage. One reason unquestionably for their production in the last few years is the increased demand for them that has sprung up, not so much from the magazines, always in the market for them, as from daily newspapers throughout the country. Until recently the dailies did not publish them, though they had done so before the war. Literature, like everything else in this age, is commercial. It is not furnished unless it can be sold, and the higher the price paid the greater the supply and the better the quality.

One of the very best of the elder group is Bret Harte, who, while editing The Overland in San Francisco 25 years since, contributed to its pages the "Luck of Roaring Camp," the "Outcasts of Poker Flat," "Tennessee's Pardner," "M'liss" and other idealized mining stories. They caught at once the ear of the English speaking race everywhere and precipitated him into fame, which still holds.

Julian Hawthorne has shone in short stories. So have Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Edward Eggleston, Edward Everett Hale, Edgar Fawcett, Brander Matthews, Charles B. Lewis, John Hay, Thomas Nelson Page, Owen Wistar, George W. Cable, Thomas A. Janvier, Richard Harding Davis, Wolcott Balestier, Joel Chandler Harris, Fred Stimson, Maurice Thompson and any number of men, young and middle aged.

Quite as many women as men do very clever short stories—Mary Wilkins, Harriet Prescott Spofford (her first, "In a Cellar," in The Atlantic, was not published for some time because it was thought to be a translation from the French), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Julien Gordon (Mrs. S. V. Cruger), Mrs. Burton Harrison, Mary Mapes Dodge, Mrs. Kate D. Wiggin, Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, Louise Imogen Guiney, Frances Hodgson Burnett and dozens of others.

There is scarcely an end of the short story writers of both sexes. Many that have been mentioned have done long stories, too, but I refer to the short, which may be called a specialty of the country. Compared with the English short stories, they are superior, as the English themselves admit, having far more variety, flavor and originality. Only the French equal us in this line of literature, and they lack our force, freshness, raciness, individuality. It has often been said that it is harder to tell a story in from 5,000 to 10,000 words than to extend it to ten times the length, and this saying is true. Condensation of thought and expression, intellectual glimpses and fertile suggestiveness are among our gifts.

JUNIUS HENRI BROWNE.

HIS UNCLE'S BOX.

"Also to my nephew, Oliver Brinton, the square iron box in my study. On each anniversary of my death he is to open the box and act as circumstances shall direct. As he shall carry out these my instructions, may God prosper him."

We all agreed that this was a very singular clause of our late uncle's will. He had not been the kind of a man to cherish a secret, and mystery was quite the last thing you would suspect him of.

When our mother died, we had not a relation in the world save him. He took Horace and me home with him after the funeral, and henceforth our home was at Wildcliff Hall.

It was a quaint, old fashioned country house, with beautiful grounds, shrubberies and woods that made summer a delight.

It was a happy life we led. Horace would come over at the week's end from Sleighford and stay until Monday.

Our uncle's death came upon us as a great shock. We were not in any way prepared for it. His health was always robust, and he was what is described as a well preserved man.

While dressing one morning he was seized with an apoplectic fit, and ere help could be summoned he expired. We laid him to rest beneath an immemorial yew in a quiet corner of Wildcliff churchyard.

When the will was read, it was found that ample provision was made both for Horace and myself. Then occurred the puzzling clause which gave us much food for thought.

The months chased each other swiftly, and it was the day when I must carry out the dead man's instructions.

I inserted the key into each lock and flung the lid back. Inside the outer lid there was placed a cork shell, forming, as a matter of fact, an inner box of cork.

Summoning resolution, with a swift movement I threw back the cork lid and looked in. With a cry I fell back a step, for there lay, in all its shriveled hideousness, a severed human hand.

As I looked intently into the box, to my horror the hand moved, assuming the attitude of writing, the fingers foreshortening and the knuckles rising. Slowly, with the utmost deliberation, it wrote.

The writing was large, round and intensely black, showing vividly against its light background of cork.

Every letter branded itself on my brain as I read these words:

"Oliver, my dear nephew, I loved a woman once. I love her still. She could not marry me. She married another. While in life I believed that she was dead. She lives widowed and poverty stricken with her only child. Her name is Ethel Elston, and they live at Dalton, 20 miles south of Wildcliff. Go to them, relieve their necessities and do as you know I would wish you to do. Farewell."

The next morning found me in the town of Dalton, bent on carrying out my instructions. I made many fruitless inquiries for Mrs. Elston, but no one seemed to know anything about such a person.

I began to doubt the accuracy of my supernatural directions, when by a happy accident I chanced upon the house I was looking for.

There was no answer to my knock. An air of abject poverty hung about the place. The panels of the door were rotten and worm eaten, giving glimpses of the interior.

I pushed the door open and entered. For a moment or two I could discern nothing. Gradually objects resolved themselves out of their surrounding gloom, and I saw a woman lying on a wretched couch, and beside her, holding her hand, a girl of about 18 or 20.

I made a slight noise to attract attention, and the girl turned her head toward me.

She looked inquiringly at me out of her large, dark eyes, and I advanced cautiously, so as not to disturb the woman, whom I now perceived to be asleep.

Whispering that I was a friend who had been sent to help them, I went out and brought back with me a doctor.

Before evening Agnes—that was the girl's name—and I had transformed the miserable little apartment into some appearance of comfort.

I engaged a nurse and made every arrangement for Mrs. Elston's comfort and for that of her daughter.

Before I left the latter and I had a long talk. Agnes told me the story of their lives with a simplicity and modesty which won my heart.

Her father had been dead many years. Indeed her parents' married life was brief. Mrs. Elston was left with a small income sufficient for their requirements. Agnes was well educated, and their lives were tranquil and uneventful.

Then disaster came. Two years ago they lost their money through a defaulting trustee. The struggle for existence was stern and bitter, and not seldom the bare necessities of life were wanting.

Mrs. Elston did not recover consciousness and passed away a day or two later, carrying with her all that I might hope to know of the early days wherein James Jamieson had loved and lost her.

* * * * * * *

Eighteen months have elapsed. Agnes Elston is my wife. Mutual sympathy has grown to mutual love, and the future looks fair beyond all promise.

On the second anniversary of my uncle's death I stood once more before the black box, thinking of all that happened in the past year.

To the best of my ability I had carried out the instructions so marvelously conveyed. Sustained with this knowledge, I threw back the cork lid with a complete absence of fear.

The box was empty.—London Spare Moments.

Pasta's Wonderful Voice.

Pasta's voice extended from low A to D in altissimo and was one of the most remarkable illustrations ever furnished of the value of musical culture in overcoming natural blemishes. Her voice was stubborn and unmanageable, but by dint of study and indefatigable perseverance she brought it to a state of perfection that was the admiration of her contemporaries. Her delight was the bravura style of ornament, and where the composer had not been sufficiently liberal in bestowing ornamentation on her part she invented cavatinas of her own and used them with such effect that they were generally regarded as the best part of her singing. She made her first appearance on the stage in 1815, her last in 1850.

"Woodman, Spare That Tree."

"Woodman, Spare That Tree," was written by George P. Morris, the story being founded on an incident which occurred during a visit of this gentleman to the old homestead. It had passed into other hands, and the proprietor was about to cut down the fine tree, which had been planted by Morris' grandfather. The poet redeemed the tree for $10, and the stately oak was thus spared.

Estimating the Visible Quantity.

His Sister (parading in her new gown)—Guess how much this ball dress cost?

He (eying her critically)—Well, supposing that the material is worth $15 a yard, I should guess it cost about 59 cents.—Chicago Record.

Disproved.

We often sneer at the Egyptians for being a slow people, but on the contrary they must have been a very busy race. Even the mummies appear to have been pressed for time.—Rockland (Me.) Tribune.

An Occupation.

He—In the next world we must give an account for every word spoken in this.

She—Then heaven must be a happy place—there will always be so much to talk about.—Boston Transcript.

The Principal Difference.

"I've heard your preacher half a dozen times," said the boy who was whittling a stick. "You people pay him $3,000 a year. He ain't a bit better'n our preacher, and all we pay ourn is $900."

"Yes, but our preacher says eyether and neyther, and yourn don't," replied the boy who was sharpening his knife on his shoe.—Chicago Tribune.

High Art.

Bessie Footlights—I should like to show you my new dance, but there isn't room for it here.

Manager—Wait till I move this table out of the way.

Bessie Footlights—That won't do any good. The ceiling is too low.—New York World.

An Unkind Remark.

Clara—Do you know, Maud, Mr. Smithers paid me a great compliment last night?

Maud—No, what did he say?

"He said I was among the prettiest girls at the party."

"Yes, I noticed you were among them."—Texas Siftings.

Nothing to Live For.

Friend—I hear that Mr. Boaster, the oldest inhabitant, is sick.

Doctor—He is, and I fear that I can do nothing for him. He cannot remember a winter to match this one, and he seems to have lost all interest in life.—New York Weekly.